

**WASHINGTON STATE RAINBOW COALITION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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**LARRY GOSSETT OF WASHINGTON STATE RAINBOW COALITION, SEATTLE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, CENTRAL AREA MOTIVATION PROGRAM, KING COUNTY COUNCIL**

**INTERVIEWEE:** LARRY GOSSETT

**INTERVIEWER:** SAUL GONZALEZ

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SAUL 00:00:12

All right, so to start What is your name and can you spell it out?

LARRY 00:00:17

Larry Gossett. L-A-R-R-Y G-O-S-S-E-T-T is my slave name.

SAUL 00:00:29

And how old are you? What's your birth date?

LARRY 00:00:34

February 21, 1945, and I had the privilege and the luck to be born in Seattle, Washington.

SAUL 00:00:54

What gender, if any, do you identify with? What are your pronouns?

LARRY 00:00:59

He and him. Nothing else.

SAUL 00:01:06

And what race or ethnicity do you identify as?

LARRY 00:01:09

African American. Black.

SAUL 00:01:15

All right, so what was your life story prior to joining the Rainbow Coalition? Did you grow up in Washington State or move here? If so, when and why?

LARRY 00:01:24

I was born in Washington State, and I lived here all my life, except for the 15 months that I was a VISTA [AmeriCorps] volunteer, and at that historic juncture 1966 to '67, I had the privilege to be assigned by the National VISTA office to New York City, where I worked for nine months in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and then five months I worked in Harlem, the northern part of Manhattan Island, the all Black part of Manhattan Island. And that experience of living in New York City as a VISTA volunteer, I have identified as the signature experience of my life. I radically changed, so much so that when I returned to Seattle on September 15, 1967, my mother and youngest brother Patrick had come to pick me up at the airport. I got out before they got there, and when they walked up, both of them walked right by me. They had no idea who I was until I said, "Mama!" and then she recognized my voice.

So I left a Negro college student from the University of Washington and came back a revolutionary Black Power young advocate, activist, and I changed my name to Aba Yoruba. I adopted a African name when I was in Harlem. So I was a radically changed individual. But other than that, I've always lived in Seattle, yeah. I returned to the University of Washington, where I graduated in 1971 as the first student ever to get a certificate. I got a degree in history, but I got a special certificate from the University of Washington indicating that I was approved to be an African American history teacher. So I believe that answers your question.

SAUL 00:04:17

Yes. And so can you talk a little bit about your involvement in electoral politics or that radicalization that you mentioned prior to the Jesse Jackson campaign?

LARRY 00:04:29

Yeah. In 1968--I'm considered one of the nineteen founders of the University of Washington Black Student Union--I drove the car. I drove a car from Seattle to San Francisco State University in Northern California on April 12, 1968.

We organized the Black Student Union on January 6, 1968, and then we went to the West Coast Black Student Union Conference in April of '68, where the keynote speaker at the Black Student Union Conference was Bobby Seale, the Chairman of The Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The Panthers had not dropped the "self defense" yet. But he had a mesmerizing impact on the twenty-three African Americans that went down to the BSU conference, and we fell in love, most of us fell in love with the Black Panther Party as a result of that interaction with Bobby Seale at San Francisco State College [sic]. And he invited us the next day to come to the funeral Lil' Bobby Hutton, the first Black Panther to be killed by a police officer in the United States, he was killed in a conflict with the police a few days before we started our conference. But as a result, he invited us to come to Lil' Bobby Hutton's funeral, and we all jumped in our cars, about 120 Black student union activists from California and Washington and Oregon, and we went to his funeral.

And most of us, I would say, were extremely impressed or fell in love with the Black Panther Party. And when we got back to Seattle, the young folks in our group--I mean, I was young, I was 22--but the 18, 19, 20 year olds, had just begged Bobby Seale to come to Seattle and authorize the founding of a Black Panther Party chapter in Seattle, and he was so impressed with our enthusiasm. I know he had a lot of things to do, but he said, "Yes, brothers and sisters, I will come up to Seattle. Of course. I'll bring a couple other Panthers with me."

And they came on April 18, 1968, and Seattle, Washington, became the first city outside the state of California to organize a Black Panther Party. So by April 18, April 19, we had two revolutionary Black youth groups going on in Seattle. They were the Black Student Union at the University of Washington and the Black Panther Party for Self Defense being the first chapter outside of the state of California to be established. Of course, soon after that April 18 meeting, Bobby was all over the country organizing Black Panther chapters. But we were proud. We were proud to be the first.

Also, I had been selected to be the Chairman of the Seattle Alliance of Black Student Unions. People that supported me and been the chapter, so my primary responsibility after the founding of the Black Panther Party was to organize BSU's, Black Student Unions, all over the State of Washington, mostly in Seattle, the greater Seattle, mostly in King County. And we had about seven or eight Black student unions organized by the time we decided that we wanted to take over the University of Washington by sitting in President Charles Odegaard's office and demanding that a [program of] Black Studies [be created] and the recruitment of Black, Latino and Native students and poor white students.

We became the first Black student organization in the country to demand poor whites have a more flexible opportunity to enter the University of Washington. And then, after our sit-in, because of the pressure of low-income Asian students, we added Asians to the folks that we were demanding the university open its doors to.

I think I should give one or two facts about the University of Washington in '68. The University of Washington in 1968 was 107 years old. There were 32,400 students on campus, only 73 of us were Black. That was .003% something... And that might not even be enough zeros, it might be .0003% and it had never been any higher. So essentially, the University of Washington was an institutionally racist environment, and that they had very few non-white students on the campus, particularly African Americans. Had about 250 to 300 Asian students, but no Black. It was even worse for Latin Americans, there was only six. And it was even worse for Native Americans, there was only four on the entire campus, two of whom became immediate--two Native American sisters and one Chicano brother joined the Black Student Union because there was no infrastructure, nothing that they could--

I mean, two Indians could talk to one another. They were both Upward Bound students, that's how they got to the UW. And then Jesús--I can't remember Jesús' last name right now. He was the only Latino that, you know, we were able to find, even though we were told that there were four or five others on the campus, and he joined the Black Student Union. So that's how we got started. We had the sit-in in Dr. Odegaard's office on May 20, 1968. He made a commitment to recruit more minority students. He made a commitment to establishing a Black Studies Program. He made a commitment to setting up a tutorial office to help ensure that many of our Black and other minority and poor white students would be able to compete academically with the other students so that we could graduate. And then the final demand was that the university established a cultural program. That manifested itself to become the Ethnic Cultural Center on 41st [Street], I believe, and Brooklyn [Avenue] and across the street, the Ethnic Cultural Theater, where Third World students could reflect themselves through art, you know, acting, singing, all kinds of stuff. And then the Ethnic Cultural Center, where the Black Student Union, MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán], the American Indian Association, and some Asian student groups, all of us started using that Ethnic Cultural Center as a meeting place, the BSU had a room there, etc. And then after that, I stated I started working for the Office of Minority Affairs and recruiting. My job was to be the supervisor of Black Student Division. In three years, we recruited 1400 Black students to the University of Washington, and Emile Pitre told me that in 2020, that was the largest amount of Black students ever recruited to the university in a three year period. I didn't know that. So we were very proud of that historic fact, reality.

After I worked in the Office of Minority Affairs until June of 1973, I wanted to return back to the community, so I returned back and became a consultant to the Central Area Motivation Program. CAMP is the oldest anti-poverty program in the City of Seattle, and it existed on 18th and Cherry Street at the time. It's the old firehouse, if you want to go by and see it. So that was the first anti-poverty agency, funded through the Office of Economic Opportunity that was begun in 1964. And in 1973, the fall, they hired Larry Gossett as a consultant to help them organize youth-oriented programs. You dig what I'm saying? All over, not only Seattle. I organized the CAMP Youth Services Department. We organized youth all over the county. That was our job. But the centerpiece of our organizing was in the Central Area, amongst low-income Black youth. And we, you know, we were pretty successful at that. And then by 1979--I came in '73--in '77, '78 somewhere in that, the executive director of CAMP resigned and they started advertising in January of '79 for a new executive, and I was fortunate enough to be selected. So from 1979 to 1993 I was the executive director of the Central Area Motivation Program.

And finally, it was in that historic period of time, 1983 to be precise with you, that I and several other younger community activists got calls from the late great Reverend Samuel Barry McKinney, the pastor at Mount Zion Baptist Church, the second oldest Black church in all of Seattle, and the biggest-- or one of the two biggest churches, Black churches in Seattle at that time. The reason that he called me, he said that he had just gotten a call from Jesse Louis Jackson, and Jesse wanted to organize a political vehicle through which he could run for president of the United States of America, and he definitely wanted a chapter in Washington State, and he only knew Reverend McKinney, so he called him. Reverend McKinney reached out to me, reached out to--

I was working, you know, I was the head of the largest predominantly Black anti-poverty program in Washington State at that time. And he reached out to other pastors. He reached out to the Black Panther Party. He reached out to as many groups as he could think about. He reached out to El Centro de la Raza. I don't know if you've heard of El Centro? So he called Roberto Maestas and asked him to get involved. And that's how I recall the Rainbow Coalition-- He called in '83, he's going to run in '84. So we started--I think we were one of the first groups, grassroots citizen groups, to be organized, because November of '83 is before the campaign started in '84. So we got ourselves together, laid a foundation. He said he wanted it to be multiracial. He told us a little bit--Jesse Louis Jackson told Reverend McKinney a little bit about the concept of a Rainbow Coalition.

But I don't remember him telling us what I learned historically later that the concept of the "rainbow"--and I think this is important for me to share to whoever will become the audience of this tape--it is historically and politically accurate that the concept of a Rainbow Coalition was begun by Fred Hampton, who in 1968, '69, somewhere in there, became one of the key leaders, if not the key leader, of the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party. He was killed by the County prosecutor, the county-- Excuse me, the Chicago prosecutor, the Chicago police chief, and all the powers that be. They were very fearful of the rise of this charismatic nineteen year old Black Panther Party leader called Fred Hampton. Fred Hampton was conscious beyond his years and knew that the Black Panther Party needed to have contacts and a broader community. So he was one of the first Panther leaders that was successful reaching out to poor and working class white youth and groups, reaching out to-- it was more Puerto Ricans than Chicanos in Chicago, I'd like to say to you, in '68, '69.

So he reached out to Latino communities, mostly Puerto Ricans, and he reached out to the Asian community, Chinatown, and he built a little Rainbow Coalition. But then in '69, the police murdered him. There's no telling how charismatic, politically, and historically important Fred Hampton as a Black revolutionary leader in this country would have been, but he is the correct father of the Rainbow Coalition, but Jesse Jackson is the one that built it around his presidential effort in 1984 and 1988, he had two major runs at becoming the president of the United States of America.

So that's the background information that I believe you've asked me for. Now I'm ready for any specific questions that you have of me about the organizing of the Rainbow. By 1986-- real quickly-- I was lucky enough to be elected, because we believed in participatory democracy, elected the chair. In 1986, Larry Gossett became the chair of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition. That's the background.

SAUL 00:22:35

Thank you. Can you talk a little bit about what the Rainbow was doing around the formation years, like in '84 and so on, and what role you also played in that?

LARRY 00:22:48

Yeah, during that period that Reverend McKinney and I and some of the other leaders of the Washington State Chapter had the opportunity--we went to Chicago and actually met in a couple of national meetings of the Rainbow Coalition with Jesse Jackson. So the thing he communicated to us was, "I can't win the presidency with just focusing on Blacks," as a leader, an activist in the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the establishment of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under Martin Luther King Jr., is where Jesse got his start.

He said, "We mostly work with Blacks and not too much with others. But this, to win the presidency, I got to have beaucoup white support, Chicano, Latino support, Asian support, Native American--" We didn't call people indigenous people then, so I'll use the terms that we used-- "I got to have rapport from anybody eligible to vote in the US, and we have to be about the business--" this is our first meeting in Chicago--- "we have to be about the business of registering people to vote, too," because many, many African Americans, because we have not historically been able to vote, are still not registered. "But I believe, we believe that my candidacy for the presidency--" and only Shirley Chisholm as a Black person had ever tried to run. She ran in '72, '74, somewhere in there, for president. She was the first Black woman and Black person to ever run for presidency of the United States. Jesse was, I believe, the second significant person of African descent that ran for presidency.

So conceptually, Saul, he made it clear that this is a multiracial group, hence the symbol of the rainbow, that's ever been built consciously in the US, and he wanted to make it work, and he knew it had to be broad based.

But his foundational support came from African Americans, and that's what he recognized, that he respected it. He was not going to alienate himself from Blacks, but it needed to be much broader. That's what we were told the first couple of times. A variety of us, and it was mostly Blacks from Washington State that went to. But we were lucky to have people like Cindy Domingo and Roberto Maestas and Doug Chan all join early on. They were at those November of '83 meetings, and so they were ready to go in February of '84 when he formally announced his presidency. There had already been articles written that he was thinking about building a multiracial group. I can't remember if we had our name before '84, I think he did, I think that the Rainbow Coalition before '84, but he started building it and spreading it.

I think--you'll have to check the record--I think that half the states in the union eventually had Rainbow Coalitions. He was never able to get it established everywhere. And I don't know why, most Blacks, or at least half the Black population, was still living down South in 1983, '84, but I don't remember Jesse having any formalized chapters in Mississippi, Georgia, and places like that. It's still hard to organize. You see the Supreme Court, another Supreme Court ruling yesterday, Saul, said that race is not significant in America. So this effort in South Carolina to say that Blacks was discriminated against was wrong, and they again discounted anything around voter registration that would be protective of Black rights. The Supreme Court said "no" again yesterday, but we're still dealing with these issues. So that's--and he built a pretty--I mean, we built on behalf of Jesse Jackson. We liked the fact that he wanted to be democratic. And he said, "You guys should vote. You should reach out to every community."

By the end of 1984, beginning of 1985, Jesse was already saying that the most rainbow of all the states in the union was Washington State. Because he came out here, he was able to come here a couple of times and see that we had people from all races, and we had a, you know, majority of--I don't know about a majority. We had a lot of whites from Bellingham, Spokane, Yakima, that eventually-- mostly young-- that joined the Rainbow, so we were a dynamic, multiracial support base. And I think that that's why many the old activists like myself, Cindy Domingo, and people from Bellingham and Yakima are still periodically coming together to celebrate the Rainbow Coalition.

So by the fall of 1984, we got--in the Democratic primaries for the presidency, Jesse got 19 to 20% of all the Democratic vote across this state. And naturally, we focused our organizing efforts on King and Pierce counties where the majority of minorities were, and he did pretty good around here. But we had substantial organizations in Spokane and Yakima and places like that by the end of 1984. And then after the fall elections, Jesse asked us to continue to organize the Rainbow Coalition, and we had become so excited about that prospect and interested in that prospect, because we, as revolutionaries and Third World activists like Cindy Domingo and others, her brother was dead, I'm sure Silme [Domingo] would have joined us had he been alive in 1983, '84, but a lot of other youth, Sharon Maeda, a lot of other youth had joined us from the Asian community.

So when Jesse came out here, he began to say at the end of '84, '85, that the Seattle Chapter is the most rainbow of the Rainbow Coalition chapters. And by that he meant multiracial, because in some states, he was not able to get beyond African Americans. And that was a unique quality that he put. He was the first presidential candidate to put heavy emphasis on being multiracial and foundational with Black leadership. He didn't see anything wrong with that, we didn't see anything wrong with that. But it had not been, not happened before '84 in the United States of America. So that was very, very unique, and everybody was, you know, surprised by how many votes he did get in '84 but particularly the amount he got in Washington State.

In '88, by the fall of 1988, the election took place on the first Tuesday in November. I can't remember what date of the month that was, but it came out in the papers. You can check it out that he got somewhere around 40%, 39 plus something, in the Democratic party primaries. Remember, I'm not talking about November, but the

primaries. I don't know if it was in August or September. Jesse Jackie did not win, because in '80--who ran for Democratic president in '88? I can't even remember. Was that [Michael] Dukakis? I think it was Dukakis. But Dukakis--I can't remember--I think Dukakis beat Jesse and what-- Remember, you got to have the majority of the votes across the nation. It's nice that you win one state, but that doesn't get you into the finals. Only the top vote getter for Democrats, the top vote getter for Republicans, makes the finals. He [Dukakis] did for president, but Jesse did better in Washington State, I think the record would show, than he did in just about any state. I think he won Michigan, was about the only state where he won. But he was very proud of the work of the Rainbow Coalition. We were very proud of the work of the Rainbow Coalition in '84 and '88.

I was very proud to be the leader of the effort from '86 to '89 we--What word am I looking for? We demised--that that's probably not the word--we ended the Rainbow experience formally in February of '89 at El Centro de la Raza, when Jesse Louis Jackson presented a new-- I still don't know why he did this. He felt more comfortable having control over the Rainbow centered in Chicago, centered in his office. So he wrote a new contract, a new national policy, constitution--I don't know what it was, I forgot what we called it--in '89 and asked chapters to vote on it, and it centralized control of the Rainbow Coalition in his office in Chicago, Illinois. And the membership of the Rainbow Coalition in Washington State was very split over whether or not we should continue organizing. He lost in '88, but we had made a commitment. We were going to keep organizing the Rainbow, he was comfortable with that, but then he called us in 1989 and said he and his boys had wrote up a new constitution, and it centered all the power on him and a few other people. And we voted 47 to 46, all the activists in Washington State to NOT, N-O-T, to not be a part of the Rainbow Coalition going forward.

I mean, he's still today, I've seen him on TV talking about the Rainbow, but it doesn't--but we chose not to be. I think it was a principled move, although it caused divisions, like El Centro de la Raza stayed with Jesse, and they stopped us from meeting at El Centro because they were hurt and bothered significantly by us not going along with Jesse Jackson. But we had to be principled, those of us that did not vote for it, and I, as the chair, was one-- My vote, we had in our constitution that the chair only votes when there's a tie. 1986 to '89 I only voted one time. You know, I might have raised my hand or said something when we were doing stuff, a lot of consensus votes. But I formally voted when the vote got to be 46 to 46 and I said, "I can't." I thought about it, but I said, "I can't go along with this stuff."

So that's how we ended the Rainbow experience in '89. So you can ask me those other individual questions that you wanted me to elaborate upon.

SAUL 00:37:31

Yeah, so actually, I wanted to follow up with another question on what you talked about. And so can you expand a little bit on, like, the year of '89 and just like the two decisions that were being made, was it about, like, grassroots organizing versus, like, focusing on Jesse Jackson's campaign, and then, how did you guys move forward? And what did that look like in the years after?

LARRY 00:37:57

Yeah, well, after '88 he made it--Jesse said, "I'm not going to run for president anymore, but this Rainbow, this dynamic Rainbow Coalition, must continue, and I definitely want to be the leader of that." But it got so democratic, and I guess he wasn't able to do the things he wanted to do, even though he said he wanted to keep it democratic, that he and some of his homeboys, comrades, you know, right hand persons from around the country, they got together and rewrote the... We didn't even know they rewrote the constitution, then they sent it out to us for verification, and that was what we were angry about. And we let Reverend McKinney--Reverend McKinney tried to talk to us, and Roberto Maestas and a few other people, they said, "We gotta stay with our esteemed leader."

But you know, many of us did not believe in going with a person just because they was a leader, and if they wanted to make it a non-democratic, like the things that exist today, between Republicans and Democrats. If it's not going to be democratic, how can it be legitimate or functional? And definitely not going to have our involvement, because we're trying to build the democratic experience here. So what was your question? I'm losing losing track of your question.

SAUL 00:39:42

Just like the decision that you guys made in '89 and how that looked, what that looked like going forward. Was it about, like, grassroots organizing?

LARRY 00:39:54

We did not believe that grassroots organizing would continue if you're setting up a political structure where the masses, the rank and file folks, did not have a vote, would not have a vote. Instead just, you know, a few people in a national office would make the decisions, and the rest of us would be expected to adhere to those decisions. That's not why we joined Jesse. We joined Jesse because we intuitively--and him, coming from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and everything made us think that he is going to make and keep this democratic. And he did from '84 to '88. But the focus, even then, had we thought about it, was getting him elected president, and that was the goal. We didn't think about how we would manifest ourselves after '88. He had already talked about keeping the Rainbow going after the '88 campaign, and he'd come out here and was very excited about us working closely with him, but the lack of an ongoing commitment to grassroots political organizing is the primary reason why the majority of the Seattle chapter of the Rainbow Coalition decided not to go along with the establishment of the new constitution, the new Rainbow Coalition constitution that he and his main supporters put forth, so we voted against it and didn't attend any other meetings.

I really-- You'd probably have to ask Estela Ortega, did they have any more meetings at El Centro or anywhere else around the continuation of the Rainbow after that? El Centro was very mad, and I don't, I don't think anybody at El Centro talked to me for a couple of years after we did not vote to go along with... of '89, yeah. And they didn't support me when I ran for political office, the King County Council, '93, the split was still going on. But the the movement around democratic organizing and decision making was the thing that caused the majority of us in this state not to stick with, right, the Rainbow Coalition. And lack of commitment to democratic organizing was the key reason that we split, and because all of us would have wanted to keep organizing around the Rainbow, because we saw that, and Jesse saw, how you get 40% of the vote, and Blacks are only 3% of the population in Washington State? Which was the case, and we're only 3.4% now, but it was 3% and 1988, you dig? You can't build no national movement. I don't know why you wanted to concentrate it with a few Black people around the country and a few whites that he liked making the decisions about what direction we'd go. We couldn't do all that grassroots, popular organizing in Washington state and then go for a national reconfiguration where we had much less power and influence over the direction of the national Rainbow than we had had, if you understand what I'm saying.

So I thought it was principle that--unfortunate, because in 1975 Roberto Maestas was the best man at my wedding. I got married in '75, Saul, and 2025 my wife and I will be celebrating our 50th anniversary. Yeah, and Roberto was--the main thing I'm trying to tell you is Roberto was my best man. And then by--I ran for office in 1993. I did not get his endorsement. I didn't get the support of El Centro de la Raza. And El Centro de la Raza has always been a democratic organization, multiracial democratic organization led by Latino people. And yeah, it bothered me that they didn't support my run for the King County Council, until after I won. I got support from El Centro every time after I won the first time, because I'm not Donald Trump. You either with me or you never gonna be with me. If you leave, you dig what I'm saying? Yeah, what's your next question?



SAUL 00:45:47

Okay, so after you guys voted like on that decision in '89, what did the Rainbow look like afterwards? Or were you still in the Rainbow?

LARRY 00:46:00

No, out. I never went to Rainbow meeting, only I think a few people at El Centro, a few other people did. It didn't exist after that, although he still uses it. Once, and old Jesse Jackson will tell you, he's still alive, but he's ill. They still use it as a name, something he represents, but they weren't able to build it. Okay? Yeah, he didn't, and then it didn't continue. I heard him use that term period-- [outside interjection] I heard him use that name, I've heard him on TV use that name all the way down to very recently, but it died.

But it was a profoundly important grassroots movement in Washington state, all at heart. And he could see it, and I appreciate it. The few times between '84 and '88 that he came out here, he said, "This is the--" and I appreciate him saying this-- "the most rainbow. Look at this audience. It's multiracial." We'd be meeting at Mount Zion Baptist Church, and there'd be 400 people and be quite mixed. In no other state that he goes and there's four or 500 people in our audience, and they're not 90% Black, 85% Black. That's Jesse Jackson talking, he saw how rainbow it is. And we couldn't have kept that together. And as you know probably better than most people, we still wouldn't have people socially, civically, still meeting, because they remember the fine days of all of us working together. You dig what I'm saying? That's why I was happy when you and Cindy called and said, "Larry, will you interview?" Because I can't go in all those demonstrations anymore. My legs really hurt walking three, four blocks. Yeah. What's your next question?

SAUL 00:48:28

So, what communities did the Rainbow organize in? And can you talk a little bit about the demographics of the Washington State Rainbow, how it approached race, gender and sexuality, and how that impacted the organizing of the Rainbow?

LARRY 00:48:41

Okay, I believe that the Rainbow Coalition was a political organization that was most progressive when it related to organizing around race and ethnic lines. We thought it was very important that we reach out to our brothers and sisters in the African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American, and progressive white communities, and religious communities, because Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Reverend Jesse Jackson came out of the Black religious pastoral [sic] traditions of this nation that got involved in leading the progressivity of politics in this country. And we were proud of that and wanted to keep that going, particularly in the political sense. So when we were organizing here, we said we got to reach out to our Latino brothers and sisters in Yakima and Wenatchee, as well as Blacks, where we could find them, as well as progressive pastoral organizations. It really helped when we go to Yakima and talk to nine or ten pastors, because all of them knew about the tradition of Martin Luther King and Jesse Louis Jackson, and that was helpful. And said, "We want to build a political amongst your ministerial group or your congregations, the ones that might be willing to support a progressive agenda."

We always, like any other political organization, we had pieces of paper that had our statewide position on issues like employment, pay, freedom of religion, but not making our organization religious, housing, relationship of the community to the popo--I mean, not popo, police, excuse me. And healthcare, we had positions, all the progressive positions in my remembrance on all the key issues facing citizens in the state of Washington that the Democratic Party--a lot of issues we wrote positions on that were the same ones the Democrats and Republicans wrote positions on. It's just that we emphasized multiracial involvement in the

leadership and the grassroots organizing efforts, and we did not want all whites making decisions about which direction we would go, because we are very experienced at how white hegemony leadership in the political arena has worked in this country. It has left us out. It left us as workers who wouldn't get no pay.

And when I first read Karl Marx and the Communist Manifesto, I just had not thought about anything related to the people that do the work ought to have a major say and what happens to the wealth, to the materials, to the money made from their wages. And then when I first read that, I thought about my daddy, my granddaddy, my great granddaddy. These Negroes never even have one white person ever call them by their last names. They called them Bob and Robert and Little Jimmy and Mary. Never Mrs. Gossett, Mrs. Carter. My mother's maiden name is Carter, and my dad's Gossett. I said, "We did all this work. We never had no say in the where the fruits of our labor went." So when I read the Communist Manifesto, that resonated with me. Oh my God, the workers controlling, in a major way, the products of their labor that never, we had no experience like that in the United States of America. And that continued way after slavery, because you soon have heard of the term Jim Crow.

They set up a system that was--there's a book written by this white guy, you should look at it. I'll get the name for you later. But, I mean, I got the title of the name, I'll get the title of the author. He wrote a book entitled 'Worse than Slavery', and it's a history of the United States from 1870 to 1954, when Emmett Till was killed. Oh, he make a case that the condition of African Americans was just almost as bad as it was during slavery. We couldn't even quit our job and and move to the North in the 1940's, when my daddy and mother were trying to figure out a way to get out of Texas. If they'd have told their boss, they'd have been stopped from moving to Seattle, Washington. My mom and dad came in '44. But if they had let white powers that be know, they'd have been told they can't leave. These examples I'm giving you are worse than slavery. Had to live in an all-Black neighborhoods, pay two and three times the rent for units of living space.

In Jackson, Mississippi, they were almost as bad as the little cabins they lived in during slavery, if you see what I'm saying, and they had to pay the rent with no choice whatsoever of how much the rent will be. And all the way up to the 1930's, 35% at least, of Black people were still sharecroppers. Sharecroppers. They were supposed to get a share of the money made from the selling of cotton, and they worked all day, and they could go to a little store on the plantation or near the plantation, get some basic food stuff they need, and then the white owner of the land and the store, at the end of the year, Sam, Larry, Jimmy, will give you a share of our profits. I'm a Black historian. I've not been able to find more than 4% of the plantation owners that ever gave any of their slaves--I mean, their tenants--money between 1870 and 1954. They let them get some supplies. They let them get some food. They let them stay in the cabins that they stayed in when they were slaves, or some of which were built after slavery. But that wasn't freedom.

They didn't let them vote. They didn't let them participate at all in the establishment of politicians. And by 1901--you can check this out, too--1901 was the last year that any Black person served in the United States Congress: the House or the Senate. I can't remember his name, or I'd tell you his name. So from 1877, when they withdrew--1876, excuse me--the summer of '86 [sic], the United States government withdrew Union soldiers--1876--out of the South, and from that day forward--and at that time, there was 116 Black men who had served or currently in state office or federal office, and I think about thirty or forty or fifty were in the United States Congress. But from the time they took the federal troops out in 1876 to 1901, it dwindled to one.

And if they had wanted Blacks to be participatory entities in the politics of this nation, that should have logically grown, because the Black population got a little bit bigger. It went down. I still can't, although there's fifty-six Black people in the United States Congress now, they have a little power. It's not reflective of being 12 or 13% of the national population. You get what I'm saying? Of this country, we don't have 12 or 13% of the

political power in this country, and that's what Jesse Jackson thought we could do if we had a Rainbow and then we ran Rainbow Coalition, Rainbow candidates for local office.

By the way, while I'm thinking of it, we did run Rainbow Coalition members for local office in '84 to '88. Jesse Wineberry won. What's this other sister? We had two or three state legislators we elected under the Rainbow Coalition. We wanted to expand that. And this is way--this thirty years after 1954, the year that I referenced to you that Jim Crow began to be broken down some the with the passage of Brown v. the Board of Education, where they tried to desegregate the schools. And today, only about half of all Black children go to school with whites, some whites, and half don't go with any. And it was all supposed to end in 1954, you know, segregated schools. We haven't made a lot of progress in that arena. And Jesse, the Rainbow Coalition wanted to eliminate racism in all the institutions of this land. That's what we were going to work on had Jesse won the presidency. What's your next question?

SAUL 01:01:09

All right, could you talk a little bit about the structure of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition, like how decisions were made and new members recruited, or new chapters formed?

LARRY 01:01:20

Yeah, we ran the Washington Rainbow Coalition. Remember, I became the formalized Chair of it in 1986, and we wanted to be democratic. So based on where we had--we didn't have activists all over the state, but based on having some in Bellingham, Yakima, Spokane, and a few other places, Seattle, Tacoma, definitely, we developed proportional representation on the state Rainbow Coalition board. I don't even know if we called it board of directors. We had a statewide organization, that's the one in '89 it voted 47-46. But we tried to do it proportional to where we had people. If we would have done it proportional based on where people were, you know, we'd had large parts of the state not represented at all if we just went by minority people, but we wanted to be democratic. We went by the white population and everything. But we put an emphasis on where we had members. Counties that had no Rainbow entity didn't get representation on our board. But what we did, we made it proportional representation, and those are the people that voted for me to be the chair of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition. And to the extent that we reflected where our membership was, I thought we did pretty good.

And then when we would make decisions, we had votes at statewide meetings like the one--because we didn't have these--you know, you and I are talking on the computer. I don't ever remember using a computer for nothing from '84 to '88. Maybe--did computers exist then? You're young, I don't even know what year you was born, you know? But we didn't have a lot of technology. Where was Bill Gates and Paul Allen in '84, were they out of high school? Because, remember, that's about the time that they started working on it, their developmental activities. I don't know. Yeah, it was around that.

But anyway, it's pretty democratic. I want to answer your question. We were conscious about being as democratic as we could be. Always the majority of our activists were in King County, so naturally, King County, or both, anybody else--it was also by far the biggest population-wise county in the state and the foundation of where the Rainbow was. So we tried to be as democratic and multiracial and sector population as we could. If we had rural activists from rural and country districts, we would try to make sure they had some representation on our statewide steering committee. I thought we did pretty good in making it democratic. I was surprised, even though our vote was only 47-46, half our activists statewide wanted to stay with with Jesse and the Rainbow, even after he changed the constitution. I don't know if Cindy Domingo remembers our vote was that close. Ask her when you talk to her again, yeah. But we stayed pretty true. Because you're interviewing me,

I believe the Rainbow Coalition membership stayed pretty true to what we interpreted the mission of our organization to be.

SAUL 01:06:04

So in terms of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition's mission, did that coincide with the National Rainbow Coalition? And the Rainbow Coalition has a strategy of inside/outside. What does that mean? And what do you think about that strategy?

LARRY 01:06:20

What are you talking about? What does the outside/inside mean? I don't have any recollection of what you mean by outside/inside. What does that mean? Have you asked anybody else that question? Because I don't know what you're talking about when you say the Rainbow had a inside/outside strategy. You might have talked to somebody else that told you about it, I don't remember that. What was the first part of your question?

SAUL 01:06:47

Your understanding of the Washington State Rainbow Coalition's mission and it coinciding--do you think it coincided with the National?

LARRY 01:06:56

Yeah up until 1989, after he ran the second time and we started reorganizing. Yeah, more or less. Jesse always, he had the tendency to want to concentrate power and stuff and make decisions and not be held accountable, but we were pretty good at holding [him accountable], and he respected us out here in Washington state. And we were helpful to him. 40% of the vote, I can't remember more than one state, one or two states. that did better than that. Yeah. Wait, wait, I need you to hold your thought, or go do something you got to do, because I got to go to men's room.

SAUL 01:07:50

Yeah, that's fine.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

Okay, what would you consider to be some of the Coalition's achievements? Do you think the Rainbow Coalition nationally and in Washington state has had a long term impact on yourself and on electoral politics? And if you could describe those impacts?

LARRY 01:08:12

Okay, let's take them one at a time. Recall in your mind what your first part of your question was?

SAUL 01:08:23

What were some of the Coalition's achievements?

LARRY 01:08:25

Okay, let's just stop there. Yes, I believe that there were achievements of the Rainbow Coalition nationally and in Washington State. Nationally, Jesse was able to build certain amount of respect amongst progressive liberal Democratic voters that we could have, other than white males, seriously considered to be in the leader of our country. That was important. Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow, all the way going back to the founder of the Rainbow Coalition concept, had an impact because it's centered around building politics in a multiracial fashion, with equality of importance of each individual member. You know, regardless of the fact you were

Native coming from an Indian reservation, or a Black living in an inner city ghetto, or a group of Blacks that are incarcerated, saying, "We want to start a little chapter here in jail." We let them do that, even though back in those days, we didn't let Black men in or out of jail vote. I don't know if you recall that. And we added to our platform a demand that anybody getting out of jail should have their voting rights restored immediately, or they should be able to register.

And then the progressivity of the politics: healthcare for everyone, jobs for everybody at a minimum wage that needed to be increased. We articulated our platforms at meetings that we went to all over the state, and some of it had an impact. Even in areas where we didn't win very many voters, some of our platforms got integrated into--I knew this because people told me, or I saw it--got integrated into the Democratic Party platforms in those local communities. So the impact or imprint of the Rainbow Coalition was even more significant than our numbers of activists and people that worked in the Rainbow Coalition. And I would submit that to the extent that you, Saul, interview people that were involved in the Rainbow, you're going to see that even though this was forty years ago, a lot of us have fond memories about it, and still think that the basic principles and mission of the organization have not been achieved, and are still worthy of being achieved here in the United States of America. And I would think, even along with me, I think many people are going to tell you, we wonder what may have happened had we been able to build a national multiracial alliance like the Rainbow Coalition that we had under Jesse Jackson, continue to build it throughout our country, where it may have made a difference. Now, certainly it had the potential of having a big difference in the Democratic Party that could have continued after '88. That's the first, now, what was the second part of that question?

SAUL 01:12:59

Just in Washington state and nationally, do you think there has been a long-term impact on yourself, as well as on electoral politics?

LARRY 01:13:10

Yes, the rainbow involvement in Rainbow Coalition has had an impact on me, because I got to be involved in development of our platforms, development of our political philosophy. And then, I want you to remember that you're talking to a cat that got excited in 92-93 about being an elected official himself, and he never thought about anything but grassroots politics before then. He got interested and was more easy to be persuaded to run for office himself, based on his experience in the Rainbow Coalition, and having the confidence that he and the activists around him could have an influence and could actually be successful. The becoming a member of the Seattle City Council, King County City Council [sic], the mayor, or something like that, was not something I thought about at all. And all three of those arenas are areas that people have talked to me about running after 1989. And then, because of the successes we had in a state, it was 3% Black, and we got 40% of the population to vote for us, and we had a Black man as the candidate, I, before '84, did not think that was real possible, and I got involved because Reverend McKinney and other important people in our community thought that we might be able to make a difference. And I learned that we can make a difference, and we had influence on public policy, and we continued after. We started, after '89, like, we ran me for King County Council in '93 and we ran a few--some of us involved got involved in a lot of local campaigns. We have ten or twelve Black representatives in the state legislature. We still just have one on the King County Council, and we have two Blacks, but four minorities on the City Council. I think all of that kind of changes, those examples, manifested themselves, partly at least, because we had a Rainbow, a successful Rainbow coalition building experience in Washington state.

And I was a King County councilman for twenty-five years, the longest term. Yeah, the most terms, eight times I was reelected, of any other member on the county council. There's one guy on the King County Council now that whenever he quits, he'll break my record of serving for twenty-five years, because he's already served for

twenty-nine years. But nobody broke my record of serving for twenty-five years. And five of those years I was the chair of the King County Council, and the only people that have a vote on who to chair are the other eight members of the King County Council, and they selected a leftist, a cat whose name used to be Aba Yoruba, and always was willing to admit that he read the Communist Manifesto and it had an impact on him. You know, a long time ago, people wouldn't have thought those kinds of things happened. First two times I ran, these cats that ran against me on the Republican side said, "He'd been in jail, he was a Black Panther, he was a Black revolutionary, he was a Black Power advocate, he agitated for, you know, for radical change," and all that kind of stuff, all in their brochures. But I still won the races. I used to--didn't think that was possible before the Rainbow.

SAUL 01:17:04

And what lessons did you learn that you think can be valuable for today?

LARRY 01:18:14

Yeah, I've talked about some of them before, but the lessons that I learned as a result of being an activist, and the Washington State Rainbow Coalition are: One, multiracial organizing led by African Americans was doable, was possible, doable, and can make a difference. And you know, all the lessons learned were later used by me in running myself and by others who were active in the Rainbow Coalition.

And let me give you another concrete example. I'm glad I thought about this. This is before--well actually, yeah, this example I'm about to give you is before 1984, I need to say that. A lot of us that became active in the Rainbow Coalition, actually started an organization in 1977 that was just like it, but only based in Seattle. In 1977, in the wintertime, we organized the MOVE, M-O-V-E, Making Our Votes Effective, and it was multiracial: Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, African Americans, and progressive whites, but mostly just the minorities. Yeah, we didn't have too many--I don't know if we had any progressive whites. But anyway, we decided that we wanted to have more influence on who became the mayor of Seattle, Washington. So we organized this group around that thought, that idea, and we called it MOVE, and we focused right away on the mayoral race of 1977 between Paul Schell and Charley Royer. Those were the two men that were in the finals. We interviewed both of them, they were both very excited about getting the minority community to support and work for them. And it was relatively close, but we went with Charley Royer, and then we went out and organized the African American, Asian in particular, Native, Latinos--there was still a growing population. We had El Centro de la Raza, I'm a founder of El Centro. We busted into, broke the door down to the old Beacon Hill school on October--Roberto wanted to do it the night of October 11, 1972. Why did he want to do it on the evening of the eleventh? Before I tell you, I'm asking you that question.

SAUL 01:21:39

I don't know.

LARRY 01:21:40

What day is October 12 in American history? I'm gonna get on your US history teacher, when you were in eleventh or twelfth grade. That's Columbus Day. October 12, Roberto said, "We going in. The police will probably come in, or come up here. We're not going to let them in, y'all. On the morning of October 12, I want to be--" Roberto was so funny-- "I want to be able to tell these guys that we came here because we were inspired by Columbus. We took over a building that we didn't own, you know, wasn't ours, but we want to make it ours so we can make the community better." You dig? And it's multiracial, it's not just Latino. And we had 124 people with us that night. So when I went with Roberto outside our door to meet with the police, and he told them that, I loved--because I knew it was coming--looking at their face. They said, "These activists are

nuttet and fruitcake tying this to Columbus," but that's why we chose that day. He wanted to be able to say, "We discovered this building and we're not leaving."

And guess what? There's been people at El Centro de la Raza from October 12, 1972, to today. And it's expanded, it's always been multiracial. They're building eighty-nine new low-income housing right now in Rainier Valley that are going to be, [?I don't know how chata?]. That's what I call Estella Ortega, because chata means, you know, kind of pug-nosed, and that's what Roberto used to call her, so I was close to them. But they're still going, they still maintain their progressive ideology, long time. I differed, significantly differed, I already told you, was around continuation of the Rainbow, but yeah, so that made a difference. I can't remember, what question am I answering?

SAUL 01:24:11

The lessons that you learned.

LARRY 01:24:14

Yeah, okay. That multiracial organizing can make a difference. The Rainbow talk, yeah. And I was lucky enough to be selected and supported as one of those Third World activists, non-white activists, that became an influential elected official in the greater Seattle area as a result of the work we did in the Rainbow Coalition. Yeah, I did not have the confidence that we should spend a lot of time trying to get a Negro elected to some kind of office until after we had the Rainbow. I thought that it was doable.

SAUL 01:25:06

All right. Well, that concludes this interview. I'll go ahead and stop recording now.

LARRY 01:25:11

Okay, do.